

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20594

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 IN THE MATTER OF THE: :
 :
 MAJOR MARINE ACCIDENT -- :
 COLLISION OF THE JAPANESE :
 FISHERIES TRAINING VESSEL :
 EHIME MARU AND THE U.S. NAVY :
 NUCLEAR ATTACK SUBMARINE USS :
 GREENVILLE (DCA01MM022) :
 NTSB PROJECT ID NO. 51701 :
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Monday,
 February 12, 2001

Interview of SHUJI YANAGIHARA

NTSB REPRESENTATIVES

TOM ROTH-ROFFY
 Investigator in Charge

TED WHITE

ROB HENRY

U.S. COAST GUARD REPRESENTATIVES

LTJG ERIN CANTWELL

LT. KEN KUSANO
 Interpreter

U.S. NAVY REPRESENTATIVE

CDR CACCIVIO

Also Present

MS. SACHIKO ARAI
 Office of Counsel General of Japan

Also Present were Representatives of the
 School and the Counsel's Office

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. WHITE: Okay. We'll start. This is Ted
3 White. We're starting the interview at 2200. I'm
4 interviewing Seaman Mr. Yanagihara.

5 Mr. Yanagihara, my name is Ted White. I --
6 we are working for the National Safety Board, and we
7 are doing a safety investigation of the accident.

8 We would like you -- what we would like to
9 know is if you would tell us in your own words what
10 happened from where you were and what happened from
11 when the collision, the first thing you saw wrong. We
12 can start at that point, from the collision on to when
13 he was rescued.

14 INTERPRETER: Stood on the bridge, stood on
15 the bridge, standing watch. Looking up, looking
16 forward. The next thing he knew, he just felt this
17 really loud noise and just a grind -- almost like a
18 grinding noise. He put his binoculars down. Three or
19 four minutes later, he felt a vibration.

20 He went back, and he felt the submarine, and
21 he saw the -- actually, he -- he -- he -- the other
22 members were saying that it was a submarine, and he
23 went to go look for himself, and he did definitely see
24 a submarine.

1 So, -- so, about five to six seconds after he
2 felt it, he felt the impact, that's when he went out
3 the starboard bridge main and went aft and looked back,
4 and by that time, the stern was already sinking. So,
5 water was definitely taken in the aft -- aft section of
6 the ship.

7 He said it was such a -- he -- he went back
8 on to the bridge -- bridge, and the captain was
9 yelling, "General Alarm, General Alarm", and everything
10 was just a panic, and there was no -- there was no
11 lights. There's no power at all. So, he went -- he
12 went down to the stateroom.

13 So, he went -- he went down -- he went down
14 the stairway on the starboard side and went back out,
15 went to the door and went back forward to his stateroom
16 to grab a life jacket. So, by that time, the water was
17 already coming up to his level -- that level, the main
18 deck level. The water was already -- you could see the
19 water coming up.

20 So, the same way he -- he went back up the
21 same way, thinking to himself, this is -- this is --
22 this is bad, this is really bad. So, by that time,
23 everybody was up there, up in the muster area -- muster
24 area, and at that point, he didn't know who was crew,

1 who was student, just such a big panic.

2 So, by that time, the water was just coming
3 up so quick, he -- he just decided he went -- he went
4 back -- he went to the 02 level. So, he was telling
5 everybody go up, go up, get higher, get higher. By the
6 time he got to the forward part of the 02 level, I
7 mean, there was waves crashing on to it already.

8 He was grabbing on to the handrail, but it
9 just -- it wasn't enough. So, by that time, he just --
10 he couldn't hang on anymore, and the waves took him
11 off. So, about three -- he was in the water. He tried
12 to get -- get to the surface three or four times, and
13 he was paddling, but he -- he swallowed some -- he
14 swallowed -- swallowed quite a bit of water, also.

15 So, he saw -- he saw a light, and then he
16 finally got to the surface. So, in front of his eyes
17 was -- there was a life -- in front of him, right in
18 front of him, there was a life raft, and he just
19 grabbed on to the line of the life raft, and he -- and
20 he thought to himself, "Oh, I've been saved."

21 There was someone next to him in the same
22 situation. So, he was grabbing the life raft. So, he
23 told him, you know, "We're saved, we're saved", you
24 know, you know, "calm down now".

1 So, about -- about -- about a minute later,
2 after they -- they calmed down, the -- the timing of
3 the -- with the swell, basically he timed it where,
4 when the swell was going up, he pushed the student on
5 to the life raft. So, from that point on, the student
6 also helped him in to the life raft, also.

7 Yeah. And when he looked around, and he just
8 couldn't -- the Ehime Maru wasn't in sight. He thought
9 seven or eight -- he thought he saw seven or eight life
10 rafts, but his eyes were just so painful from the --
11 just from the fuel, that he really couldn't see very
12 well, and he was yelling at -- you know, he was yelling
13 to everybody, "Hey, is everybody okay? Is everybody
14 okay?"

15 He couldn't see very well. I mean, he was --
16 he couldn't make out if there were four or five people
17 in other rafts. He just calmly said, you know, "Come
18 rescue us". Yeah. He said -- he felt like it took
19 forever to -- for someone to rescue them. Finally,
20 when they came, and he just felt so relieved.

21 MR. WHITE: Okay. Did he have a life raft on
22 -- a life jacket?

23 INTERPRETER: Yeah. He said there's no -- he
24 did not have time to put it on.

1 MR. WHITE: So, he did not have one?

2 INTERPRETER: He had one, but he didn't have
3 -- he didn't have time to put it on. So, he just went
4 to the -- that's when he just went to the top of the 02
5 level. That's -- from that point, the waves took him.

6 MR. WHITE: Where did he get it from?

7 INTERPRETER: Yeah. He -- he went -- when he
8 initially went -- he ran back to the stateroom, that's
9 when he grabbed it out of the stateroom, and then --
10 and then when he went back up, he -- he just says he --
11 he couldn't -- he couldn't wear it. It was so much --
12 it was sinking so fast, that he just didn't have time
13 to -- yeah. I mean, it was so fast, that there was no
14 way to put on that jacket.

15 MR. WHITE: Okay. Who was on the bridge
16 before he left the bridge to go get his life jacket?
17 Did he see the chief radio officer, Mr. Sigawa?

18 INTERPRETER: Yeah. He -- he just didn't
19 know who -- who the crew was or who the students were.
20 So, he just --

21 MR. WHITE: He didn't see him up on the
22 bridge?

23 INTERPRETER: He doesn't know. He doesn't
24 know. He doesn't know. There was just so much -- so

1 much going on at the same time, that he couldn't -- he
2 didn't recall if he saw him or not.

3 MR. WHITE: Do you want me to ask the age
4 question and so on?

5 MR. ROTH-ROFFY: No.

6 MR. WHITE: Okay. I don't think --

7 MR. ROTH-ROFFY: Well, we can ask him his
8 age.

9 INTERPRETER: 59.

10 MR. WHITE: 59.

11 INTERVIEWER: I've got just one. You didn't
12 have time to put your life jacket on, but did you hold
13 on to it?

14 INTERPRETER: He was holding on to it, but
15 then it got washed -- he had it with him when he went
16 to the bridge. So, when -- so, he had it up to the
17 point where he had it on the bridge, just didn't have
18 time to put it on and scrambling -- scrambling for the
19 life rails and then the next thing you know, the -- the
20 wave took him overboard, and by that time, he lost his
21 life jacket.

22 INTERVIEWER: He lost his life jacket. Okay.

23 INTERPRETER: So, he did -- he did have it up
24 to that point.

1 INTERVIEWER: Okay. That's all I have.

2 Thanks very much.

3 MR. WHITE: And the interview was concluded
4 at 10:15.

5 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)